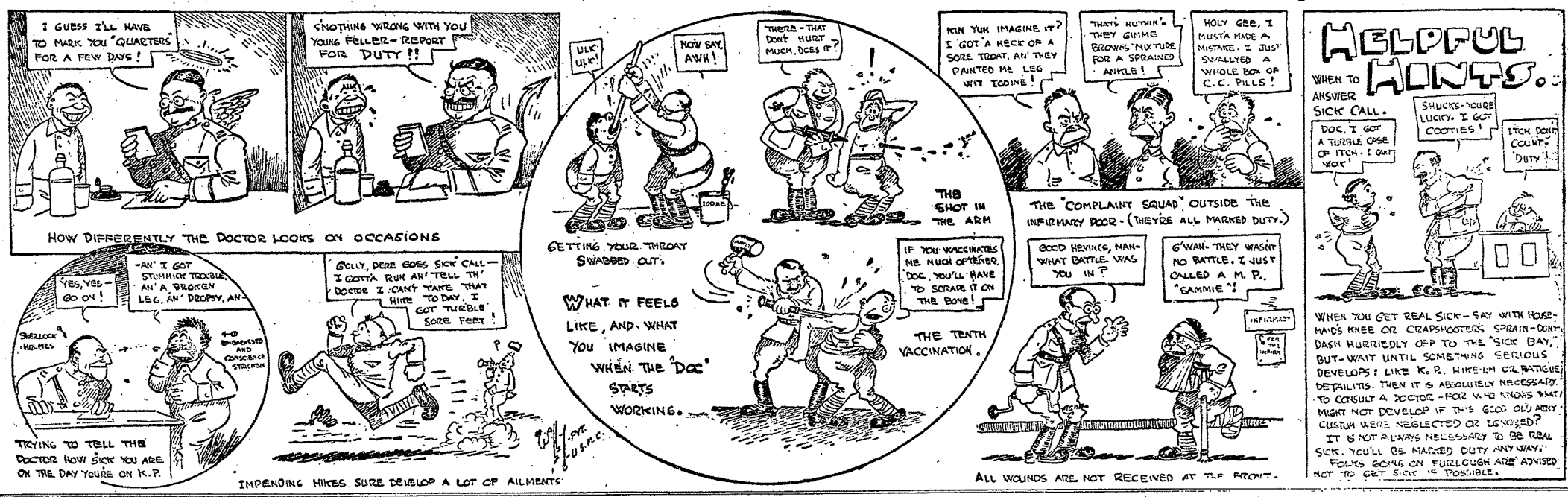
ANSWERING SICK CALL —By WALLGREN



VERDUN SLEEPS IN RUINS, DREAMS OF HER RESURRECTION

Doughboys Camp in Silent City Peopled Only By Soldiers

AMERICANS HOLD CITADEL

Walls Will Rise Again When Tourists Walk Where Poilus and Yanks Swap Tobacco

So common are blasted villages on the Western front that a traveler passing through Verdun today would pay little attention to the shattered buildings and ragged walls of that once gay and prosperous city.

Verdun—the city that was like a magnet to the German armies for nearly four years, but in which the enemy never set foot—stands today silent and lonely. Its only inhabitants are a few French soldiers and a unit of American doughboys which helped to launch the successful attack east of the Moselle last week. There is not a civilian within its walls, although German shells ceased to whistle and crash upon its battered architecture several days ago when the Boches sent over a few scattering farewell shots before hauling their artillery back to safer positions.

Within the past few weeks various American units have camped overnight in the city, either going to or from the lines. Pioneer units have cleaned the streets of their debris in order to enable the lumbering camions to pass forward with their loads of ammunition and food. So well has this work been carried out that one passing through the city streets would hardly distinguish them from the streets of any French city far back of the lines except for the boarded-up windows and the ugly holes made in the walls where shells have penetrated.

Grass Along Sidewalk

Letter boxes, where the postman once made his daily rounds, have long since been eaten by rust. Some have fallen to the ground, others have been pierced by shell fragments.

Streets that have not been used by military traffic have long lost their marks of usage. Grass has grown up between the cobblestones and along the sidewalks. The bureau de postes, which has received many a shell during the past four years, would hardly be recognized by its former patrons.

In front of one of the few buildings that are still intact save for a shattered roof, a French poilu stood last Monday and gazed upon the neighboring ruins. Questioned by a Yankee comrade, he said that he was home on permission. His face wrinkled with a hard smile as he spoke.

"Four years ago," he said, "I left my father and mother here and went to war. Now I return here for the first time since I departed, and find this."

The Lonely Citadel

Verdun's citadel, to the passerby, is like a curiosity shop in a Latin village. It stands to itself on the hill, as lonely as Verdun itself. It is now being used as a Yankee headquarters, and Yankee dispatch bearers, with roaring motorcycles ride in and out of its gates at all hours of the day and night. Occasionally, within the past week, batches of German prisoners have passed in and out of the gates.

The ancient guns that once spoke from concealed positions in defense of the city have since been returned to their old positions in the citadel. They were too ancient to follow up the retreating Huns, as did the other and more modern pieces of like caliber.

In front of the city, toward the German lines, horses now feed over shell pitted fields. Grass is growing green in the shell holes, and when spring comes again blood-red poppies and sun flowers will grow where, for four years, no living thing could exist.

Within sight of the city, marked by zig-zagging rows of trenches and twisted barbed wire, is what was once the front line and No Man's Land. But now American soldiers going to or from the lines pass over the old battle ground knowing that only a chance shot from a long range German gun could cause any immediate danger.

Verdun is only sleeping after four years of hardships. In the days to come the carpenter's hammer will awaken the stilled city and rock masons will spill their plaster on the sidewalks below as the shattered buildings are rebuilt.

And in the years ahead many an American will tell the story of how he, with his regiment, camped over night in the city when Verdun was nothing but a rock pile, and how the American doughboys and French poilus swapped tobacco on the street corners and lit their cigarettes in a secluded spot where the match glow could not be seen by enemy aviators.

FROM THE SELLE TO THE MOSELLE

On October 15, in the midst of the advance beyond Romagne in Argonne, a pigeon arrived breathless at one corps headquarters with the news that the Infantry was holding the line at Nantillois, a point several kilometers behind that from which the new advance has been launched. There was some bewildered and anxious telephoning before any one noticed that the date of the message was October 6. The bird had been AWOL for nine days.

"I was just coming down that hill," narrated the M.P., "not having had a thing to eat in two days, being so busy bringing back Heinies, when I sniffed hot cakes a-brewing at the bottom of it. Going around a clump of bushes, I looked at the place the smell was coming from and there, sure enough, was a real kitchen, smoking up to beat all get-out.

"You can be sure I stepped along. But before I stepped very far—blooey! A shell landed square on that kitchen, blew the stove and the cook and all to smithereens, and scattered torn-up hot cakes all over the map of the salient."

"I went in and asked to be taken off M.P. duty. After that, I didn't dare trust myself leading droves of Heinies back, and me with a loaded gun!"

The men at the front die many times. Take the young Artillery liaison officer from Topeka who had just left the dug-out telephone where he had been talking for three hours and had not gone a dozen yards when the man who followed him at the mouthpiece was killed by a shell. Then another shell dropped just outside the trench along which he was making his way.

He heard it coming. He tried to flatten himself like cigarette paper against the trench wall. He could smell the powder, feel the heat against his face, see the flash before he heard the report of the explosion which buried him under an avalanche of dirt. A moment later and he could hear his friend calling out from 15 feet ahead.

"Are you all right, old man?"

"I think I'm dead," he replied.

Afterwards, he realized that it must have sounded strange. But at the time, he had meant it. He really thought he was.

One Infantry sergeant, badly wounded in action in Argonne, did not really come to till he woke one morning in a snowy bed in a distant hospital. The nurse, a benevolent vision, was bending over him.

"Are you feeling better, Lieut. Johnson?" she asked.

He thought that over for a while and then decided the voice was not part of the strange dream that had been haunting him.

"You've got me wrong, miss," he said, "I'm Sergeant Johnson."

"Oh, no, you're not," said the nurse, "you were promoted while you were asleep."

A batch of 200 German prisoners filed down a hill north of Verdun. At their head marched a German captain. He halted the line at a crossroads and asked an American M.P. which was the shortest way to divisional headquarters.

The Americans fighting on the British front advanced so rapidly to the little river Selle that the headquarters behind them had a sight of work to do in order to keep up.

Even the well-stocked prisoners' cage had difficulty in staying put. Prisoners sent back toward the end of the nine days' attack, on arriving at the cage, complained with some justice of sore feet.

Mr. Adrian, the man who invented the barracks, ought to shake hands with Mr. Nissen, the man who invented the hut.

There are plenty of Mr. Adrian's barracks along the British front, but they seem to be outvoted by Mr. Niessen's huts. And the latter, as the Yanks in those parts can tell you, are not so wretchedly uncomfortable.

They are certainly more homelike than a dugout in what used to be the front line trench last spring—and that front line trench may be so far in the rear now that, despite the silence of the devastated Somme basin, you have to strain your ears to hear the sound of the guns.

This fact might be construed as likely to give aid and comfort to the enemy, but here it is, anyway. The Americans with the British are fed on British rations, and British rations mean tea.

The other day a quantity of coffee arrived in the mess shack of one American unit. The report that seven army corps had been detailed to stand guard over that coffee is exaggerated, but only slightly.

The Tommy is a fine scout, individually and collectively; his M.P.'s, for instance, are the soul of courtesy to a brother soldier, whatever his flag and his uniform. But the Tommy has one shortcoming in which, through no lack of good will or politeness, he still persists. He calls the American soldier a Sammy.

Sometimes he shortens it to Sam, which is at least not quite so feminine. Sometimes, never having experienced the delights of a minstrel show, he distorts it into Sambo.

You may not like it, but you haven't the heart to tell him so. He uses it in utter friendliness, and as a mark of friendliness the Yank receives it.

There are a few tolerably intact houses in the Somme region, but there ought to be a reward for anyone who can locate a whole window pane. The windows in a division C.O.'s office, if the room is fortunate enough to have a whole sash left, will probably be covered with oiled paper, which lets in the light, but keeps out the cold and the scenery. Anyway, there is not much scenery left thereabouts.

Shortly after it had been rumored through the American lines that Germany had made a bid for an armistice, an eavesdropper near a certain field kitchen north of Verdun would have heard three K.P.'s of a certain doughboy regiment discussing the peace question.

Darkness had settled down and hid the kitchen in its already camouflaged position in the edge of a forest. There were no lights other than the faint glow of a few live embers from the supper fire. Two of the K.P.'s, bending over a wash tub, were peeling potatoes, while a third scrubbed away on the blackened pots and pans.

"I got a life-sized painting of me doin' this when peace comes," said one of the doughboys.

"Huh! What else would you do to earn a living?" retorted the one washing the pans.

"Oh, don't you worry about Smithy," said the third K.P. "His old man's got enough jack to buy the Brooklyn brewery. I know Smithy all right; he's pretty well fixed."

"Yes, and that ain't all," said Smithy. "I got a wife, too. I can just see her comin' down the path to meet me." He threw down the half peeled potato and brought forth a well preserved photograph. "This," he said, "is her. And do you know that in a letter the other day she said, 'When the war's over—'"

"Come on there! Get busy on them spuds! Remember we got a bunch of hungry men to feed in the morning who's goin' to be fighting all night. Where you think you're at, anyway—a rest camp?" The mess sergeant's voice was everything but friendly.

"Oh, hell!" said Smithy, as he replaced the photograph and picked up the half peeled potato, "this is too busy a place for a fellow to talk peace."

A Yank entered a certain divisional P.C. north of Verdun two Sundays ago and was somewhat startled to see some one sitting at a table who reminded him very much of the pictures he had seen of von Hindenburg.

The soldier was almost frightened when the man before him said, "Vot vill you have?" He wasn't sure that he had not entered an enemy P.C., but he took a chance.

When the visitor explained his mission there the rather ponderous man, who wore the uniform of the United States Army and the bars of a first lieutenant, replied: "Vell, you vant der captain."

Later the soldier questioned the lieutenant about the resemblance to the owner of the late lamented line.

"Vell, no; I ain't Hindenburg—not yet. I vas in der American Army mit Pershing ven Pershing vas a captain. Pershing is a general now, and me—I am a lieutenant. Maybe, someday, if I question annodder million prisoners or so, maybe I am a captain."

The lieutenant was Oscar Lottig, for 20 years first sergeant of a certain Engineer regiment.